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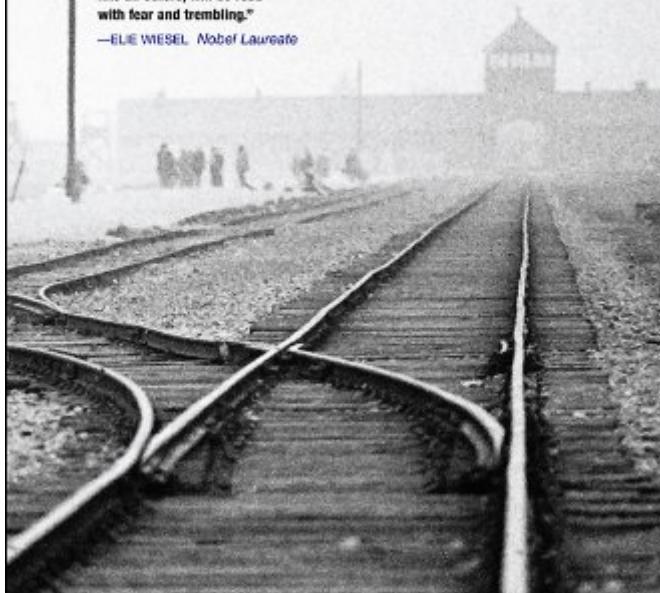
# Inside The Gas Chambers: Eight Months In The Sonderkommando Of Auschwitz

SHLOMO VENEZIA

## Inside the Gas Chambers

EIGHT MONTHS IN THE SONDERKOMMANDO OF AUSCHWITZ

"This Holocaust survivor's testimony, like all others, will be read with fear and trembling."  
—ELIE WIESEL, Nobel Laureate



PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



## **Synopsis**

This is a unique, eye-witness account of everyday life right at the heart of the Nazi extermination machine. Slomo Venezia was born into a poor Jewish-Italian community living in Thessaloniki, Greece. At first, the occupying Italians protected his family; but when the Germans invaded, the Venezias were deported to Auschwitz. His mother and sisters disappeared on arrival, and he learned, at first with disbelief, that they had almost certainly been gassed. Given the chance to earn a little extra bread, he agreed to become a 'Sonderkommando', without realising what this entailed. He soon found himself a member of the 'special unit' responsible for removing the corpses from the gas chambers and burning their bodies. Dispassionately, he details the grim round of daily tasks, evokes the terror inspired by the man in charge of the crematoria, 'Angel of Death' Otto Moll, and recounts the attempts made by some of the prisoners to escape, including the revolt of October 1944. It is usual to imagine that none of those who went into the gas chambers at Auschwitz ever emerged to tell their tale - but, as a member of a 'Sonderkommando', Shlomo Venezia was given this horrific privilege. He knew that, having witnessed the unspeakable, he in turn would probably be eliminated by the SS in case he ever told his tale. He survived: this is his story. Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Shlomo Venezia is a very lucky man, a blessed man, one who saw the fires, witness the gassings, and lived through the selections of death. This eyewitness account is gruesome and horrific, yet it needs to be told. He bears witness and truly sacrifices of himself to lay out his time at Auschwitz and explain in exacting detail each horrible moment in time. It's sad but he states, "As soon as I feel a little joy, something inside me closes up immediately.... I call it 'the survivors' disease." This disease eats away at his life and whenever he experiences light hearted times of joy, the disease rears its ugly head and pulls him back to the depths of darkness. Witnessing certainly marked Shlomo for death, yet he survived to tell his tale. Why was he spared when so many others perished? You can't help fear the times and struggles he faced and the images are often harsh and bitter, yet you struggle through as he did in life. Day in and day out the numbness to death is cold like an arctic wind cutting right through your clothes to freeze you to the bone. I can't imagine how numb he must have been to continue living among the dead and dying. His daily tasks were beyond endurance yet he came forth and brought life to those who passed through the chimneys at Auschwitz. As stated by Simone Veil - "This is the only only complete eye-witness account that we have from a survivor of the Sonderkommandos."

I just finished a book called I Have Lived a Thousand Years that my son was required to read. I don't think I have ever cried that much in my life reading one book. This book popped up on my "you may want to read list" and I skimmed the previews. There is one picture alone to me that says a thousand words. This is a picture of the gas chambers before the arrival of the Jews. What incredible words. Let's take a picture before they arrive to commemorate the completion. To think of all the amazing things that man has built in history to be proud of and then to think of the men building knowing they were building these horrible chambers to slaughter millions just because they can. Men standing around talking about the "plan" in the same way that you would plan something wonderful like a festival or celebration. Yes we'll lead the old women and children into this room, strip them, shave them and burn them half alive. No we should do this, this would work better. This one picture, a picture they were so proud to take makes me wonder - how could so many just be "following orders". How could they stand by and watch it happen in front of them. Come to work each day and then go home and hug their own children. It simply can't be.

I read this book in one day, that's how powerful the story is. Shlomo describes everything in such detail that you feel as though you are seeing it through his eyes. Elie Wiesel is right, you will read this document with fear and trembling as you imagine yourself in Venezia's shoes. For those of you who have read Wiesel's 'Night', this book is a way more interesting read because while Wiesel was in the camp just trying to eke out an existence, Shlomo was in the god damn Sonderkommando, at the very heart of the death machine. The stories contained within are truly horrible, like his descriptions of when the chambers are opened after a gassing, or how the initial processing occurred upon arrival into the camp. Just imagine yourself in that situation, your soul simply cannot fathom the anguish, the despair, the constantly looming threat of death following you around 24/7! My God, the madness of Europe in that era! My heart was beating at an accelerated pace pretty much all day as I read this. Buy this book, you will be blown away by its power. Best book I've read in ages. By the way, I'd like to add that there are some quality images included when key details are being explained. David Olere's paintings are reproduced within the book to give the reader a complete understanding of what Shlomo is actually referring to. David Olere was a surviving Sonderkommando as well, so the images are true representations, and not some artist's or scholar's interpretation of a testimony.

This is a rare book written as a long interview with Shlomo Venzia a survivor from the Death Camps in Poland - who worked for 8 months in the Gas Chambers. It is important to read Venezia's testimony!!!!

How can one "love" such a book? It's traumatic, graphic, and portrays how inhuman people can be to other people once the other crowd has become thought of as sub-human animals. So I don't "love" the book, but I found its contents riveting and informative.

I found this book with more of a insight into what went on inside the gas chambers themselves and the men who worked in them. I also realized that some people's lives can mean no more than a fly on a table ready to be disposed of with little or no thought at all. It's strange that a people can be killed in mass production shops like making a car on an assembly line. The Nazi found that by using the SonderKommando that the operation could be done by the same people they were going to eventually kill so it would all be kept quiet. It's hard to comprehend how a human being could do such things. But like the book says "you can get used to anything over time" And that is the scariest part of all. They did.

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